

Literary Analysis: Dramatic and Verbal Irony

In real life, things are often different from what they seem. When this occurs—both in life and in literature—it is called **irony**. Writers and playwrights make use of two forms of irony to surprise and entertain their readers and viewers.

In **dramatic irony**, the characters think one thing to be true, but the audience knows something else to be true. This creates interest and tension in a story or play. In **verbal irony**, words seem to say one thing but mean something quite different.

DIRECTIONS: Explain the verbal or dramatic irony that exists in the following passages.

1. Upon hearing Proctor's and Mary's statements, Danforth is shaken by the idea that Abigail and the girls could be frauds. Danforth challenges Proctor with this: "Now, Mr. Proctor, before I decide whether I shall hear you or not, it is my duty to tell you this. We burn a hot fire here; it melts down all concealment."

verbal irony: Abigail and the girls are lying and yet they are not made to tell the truth.

2. Parris, to save his own reputation, is eager to support Abigail's claims and the court's decisions. He accuses several people of making attacks upon the court. Hale's response is this: "Is every defense an attack upon the court? Can no one—?"

Dramatic irony: Hale asks the question and the audience KNOWS it to be true - every defense HAS been viewed as an attack upon the court.

3. Proctor reminds Mary of a biblical story about the angel Raphael and a boy named Tobias. In the story, the boy frees a woman from the devil and cures his father of blindness.

verbal irony - Instead of freeing someone with her words, Mary condemns John Proctor instead.

4. Proctor is informed that Elizabeth has said she is pregnant. Proctor says he knows nothing of it but states that his wife does not lie. Later, when questioned about her husband's fidelity, Elizabeth lies, thinking she is protecting her husband and his reputation.

Dramatic Irony - the audience knows the truth about Abigail and John, and that Elizabeth is lying to protect her husband / Verbal Irony - Elizabeth thinks she is saving John by lying, but the lie condemn